

FLATHEAD COUNTY LONG RANGE PLANNING TASK FORCE

MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2006

Members Present	Members Absent	Others
Gary Hall Joe Russell Turner Askew Tom Jentz Diana Blend Kerry Finley Myrt Webb Chuck Roady BJ Grieve (alternate for Jeff Harris)	Jed Fisher Dennis Hester Charlie Johnson Don Hines Mike Meehan Mike Pence Marsha Sheffels Jim Patrick Bob Horne Velvet Phillips-Sullivan Bill Shaw Jane Leivo Karen Reeves Richard Surynt Pam Kennedy	Rick Moore Greg Ponce

Call to Order

- Meeting called to order at 4:07 p.m.

Introductions

- New Secretary: Cara Cameron - 2006 Leadership Flathead Graduate and Plum Creek employee (Senior Manager IT Services – Forestry)
- Guest Speaker: Rick Moore – Forester DNRC

Attendance

- Several concerns expressed about the low attendance.
- Note: Greg Ponce – Kalispell unit manager from DNRC, joined mid-meeting.

Agenda Approval

- Modification: Don Hines was not present to provide the Growth Policy progress report (Revise agenda item 6A)
- Myrt Webb moved to approve, Joe Russell seconded

- Motion approved.

June Minutes Approval

- Minutes for June meeting were not yet available, so they were not distributed or approved.
- Diana Blend provided recap: During the June meeting the Task Force reviewed the remainder of the Natural Resources recommendations from the Natural Resources committee. The Task Force voted that this document be recommend to the Commissioners and Planning Board. The recommendations are available on the website under Reports.
- Most of the remainder of the agenda did not take place.

Old Business

Growth Policy Progress Report

BJ Grieve provided Growth Policy progress report:

- In general, the Growth Policy process is going well.
- The written comment period has closed. They received 183 written comments from people or groups – which equates to about 500 pages – working to get through this information
- Tuesday night they had public hearing for more comments 252 signed in 52 spoke. Only 29 were opposed.
- Another public hearing scheduled for tonight. Once complete all input will be compiled into a report with suggestions for each input item for the Planning Board.
- Mid September workshops will be used to revise documents – then forward to commissioners for approval. There will be a 30 day comment period, after which the Planning Board can either adopt or take other action at that time.

Diana: What time will everything be said and done?

BJ: On September 6th people can address the board to see if their comments were considered/interpreted correctly.

- Comments will be published on the web site. Planning to discontinue publishing paper copies to reduce costs. (To date 523 paper copies have been handed out).

Turner Askew – why don't you make comments available on CD?

BJ - Sure – then people can come by and pick up a copy if interested

Kerry Finley – what kind of comments are you getting?

BJ – Lots of feedback/input. Comments were very constructive, positive and specific.

- Roughly 5-10 policies are getting the majority of the attention.
- Each comment will be retyped and classified as it pertains to a specific chapter of the plan.

- For many of the comments, opposite opinions were also received. This was helpful to the planning board in that it guided them to reword parts of the policy for greater clarity.

Example:

Private driveways accessing roads...Every 100 yards someone backing out – this decreases mobility, creates safety issues. Policy was not written well to reflect that concern.

Diana - Will the Planning Board see comment as it comes in?

BJ – No, they will get the collection of comments with staff recommendations. They can then agree/disagree with staff recommendations. This will be more efficient for the Planning Board members as they may not have time to read the comments as they come in.

Diana - Will the meeting on September 6th be video taped?

BJ – Yes.

Joe - When you have a part of the Growth Policy that you will not change – are you addressing why you will not be changing?

BJ - Yes. There will be language that clarifies why the policy exists.

Chuck Roady - Some comments referred to the need for more maps – are there going to be more maps?

BJ – No, the spatial goals are reflected in the document through text. Developing more maps is not the intent of this effort, not an appropriate use of time.

Chuck - Perhaps that should be mentioned, since so many comments were made in this area.

BJ – Good point.

New Business

Forestry Presentation

Rick Moore, Forester for the DNRC gave a Forestry presentation:

Key points:

- If we want quality usable open space, then we should maintain a healthy forest products industry. Failure to do so can result in loss of open space.
- Benefits: Wildlife habitat, recreation, water quality and quantity, landscape, wood products, carbon sequestration/air quality.
- Demand for timber is 505 MMBF, supply is only 155 MMBF. Big gap between demand and supply – mills have to go elsewhere to get wood.

- Issues surrounding timber supply: urban sprawl, fragmentation, rising land values, property taxes, aging population of landowners holding larger parcels, changing ownership goals of landowners, changing public use patterns and reduced funding on USDA national forest lands, lawsuits restricting timber harvesting on public lands
- Rising land values result in the industry selling parcels.

Benefits of maintaining a healthy forest products industry:

- Areas have greater employment when both tourism and forest products exist.
- Wages for Forest Products sector are better than for tourism, more favorable employment statistics.

Effects of a declining forest products industry:

- Loss of bidders because the infrastructure no longer can be supported.
- Loss of support industries: fuels, machinery, etc.
- If we don't have an outlet for timber, then we may have to look at other options for state lands.
- Plum Creek and Stoltze are open for public recreation – if those go properties go away people will look to public lands.

Discussion Points:

- We need to redefine sustainable forestry in the Flathead, stabilize the timber supply and maintain open space.
- Look to new business opportunities: e.g. Biomass – Glacier High School will be heated with wood chips (200 tons per year) a byproduct of active timber harvest. Price paid for chips \$35 per ton.

Conclusion: Maintaining a vibrant Forest Products Industry will maintain open space.

Joe Russell – what drives Plum Creek to sell so much of their holdings for subdivisions?

Rick - They buy land in the south so they can make boards twice as fast. There is a demand in the NW that cannot be met. They sell off the prime real estate.

Diana - With biomass – (Glacier High School project) how much will be chipped in the forest?

Rick – all of it. That's part of the requirement – chip in the forest and haul to the school.

Diana – Something happened 20-30 years ago where the environmental interests separated themselves from the forestry interest in this country. They are moving in different directions – polarizing one another. What can we do to help cultivate dialog?

One example of progress in this area:

Blackfoot Challenge – people working together for purchasing Plum Creek land with The Nature Conservancy.

Greg - We as a community need to begin dialogue – we’re starting it here – but Forest Service is not in the room. The system the Forest Service operates under is pretty much given over to appeals. It’s too easy to appeal their process. It’s a big problem. Not enough people voice support for timber program.

Turner – Industry is selling property around lakes – people need to understand that industry owns the land, and to have influence, you need to work to make them want to continue working with you. If you take a narrow point of view (i.e. “you can’t close this trail”) – then you may find that the property gets sold and you then have to work with your neighbor who may or may not be amenable.

Diana – good presentation – helps us to rethink open space.

Rick works with private land owners to help them manage their land and understand the benefits of maintaining the forest.

Diana - More and more people want a piece of the lifestyle. Only the wealthiest can get the larger tracts. The countryside becomes more gentrified. Fragmenting the land is very apparent in the developments here. In Sequim Oregon (Olympic Peninsula), land has become fragmented due to real estate boom. Elk habitat has dwindled and character of the area has changed.

If the markets are strong and there is a good price for timber, this will keep the industry going. Need to also look at other incentives, like tax breaks.

Chuck – Huge lobby groups have tried to create incentives – it is very hard to get capital gains legislation because of our population in Montana relative to the overall US population.

Future Task Force Goals, Organization and Funding

Gary Hall would like the TF to continue moving ahead in the form of a think tank. The task force was formed with the goal of fostering long-range thinking relative to land use planning; it has morphed into helping with the development of the Growth Policy. The question now is what is next? Do we continue or disband? Gary is excited about the future of the task force – he would like to see it stay in place.

Gary also brought up the discussion about the value of having 1, 2 and 3 year terms – how this should be implemented and what the rotation should be. Added that he hoped most of the members would stay on board because he values their contribution.

Gary – the Task Force will need to vote in a new chairman by next year.

Next Meeting

The group discussed the possibility of taking some time off to give members a break. The general observation being that members are getting burned out and committees are less active.

Kerry – We wasted the first 6 months of the Task Force and lost momentum. Then when the specific goal of helping support the development of the Growth Policy materialized, it gave the Task Force focus and momentum.

Gary asked if we needed to take time off through year end and start back up in January. Diana suggested a break later in the year (e.g. November/December/January).

Tom Jentz – People are busy, making it hard to get to the meeting. A fresh focus might help.

Myrt – We need to re-visit committees, have fewer in number and be more active – right now they aren't meeting often.

Diana and Gary will regroup and put together agenda for September.

Goals

Members should give thought to what the goals should be for the Task Force. What kinds of discussions do you want to have?

Myrt - We should track things – what's happening on the ground now that we have this policy? For example – what are the consequences of traffic increasing in a specific area? Select maybe three or four other things and focus on those items. Base it on data.

Tom - The valley is seeing 5.5% growth rate per year. We need to help change the mind sets about what is happening in our growing environment. We're repeating mistakes in every other jurisdiction. Need to have better planning around transportation, water, etc. Despite greater level of scrutiny on projects – the growth outpaces our ability to get ahead.

Turner - Developers will support better development if there is policy around it. The developer is a pass through – he just needs to know what the expectations / rules are – and he'll deliver. The ground rules need to be consistent.

The Aspen Group (with a current project in Columbia Falls) has a subdivision in Bozeman. As you drive into that subdivision – it is very attractive with parks and lakes. Garages are built in the back of the house. We need to be creative in how we develop properties in Flathead County.

Diana – when we have these discussions and venues – the information doesn't reach outside this group. We need to get the information out to the communities to expand awareness and influence positive change. How can the Task Force information be used to provide more value to the community?

Tom– Government representatives can readily take any worthwhile information back to their offices and staff for consideration.

Funding

- Kerri – what about funding?
- Gary – his department has created a fund writing position which we can take advantage of.
- Diana and Gary will talk about funding before next meeting.
- Mike Pense will present county budget at the end of next meeting.

Public comment period

None

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 5:52 PM.